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EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL STUDIES ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST

XXXIX. THE LORD'S SUPPER

MATT. 26:17-30¹

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. *Date.*—According to the testimony of the Synoptists, the evening of Thursday, the 14th day of Nisan. The Johannine chronology (19:14) would seem to place the supper on the previous evening. The attempts to harmonize are unsatisfactory.

2. *Indication of place.*—Probably made simply and distinctly, as in Matthew, to Peter and John (Mark 14:13; Luke 22:8). The accounts of Mark and Luke do not necessarily involve the exercise of supernatural knowledge on the part of Jesus, but may indicate a preconcerted signal. It is possible, though less likely, that Jesus left the matter to chance, knowing that during the feast, which was a time of generous and universal hospitality, any householder having an unoccupied upper room would gladly open it to devout pilgrims, asking no other reward than the skin of the paschal lamb and the earthen dishes used in the meal. In any case, Jesus' method kept the knowledge of the place from Judas, who might otherwise have attempted to arrest him before Jesus' purpose in the supper had been attained.

3. *The traitor.*—It does not seem probable that Jesus held Judas up to the open scorn and contumely of his fellows. In neither Mark nor Luke is he definitely pointed out. In Matthew he seems to have remained until the end of the supper; and inasmuch as he very probably reclined at Jesus' left, the words may have been spoken so gently that no other ears than those of the traitor himself heard. Only in John does Judas leave the table; and even then no one seems to have understood his purpose and intent (13:28). Both from the accounts and from the character of Jesus, it would seem as if the Master strove through warnings, now as stern as Amos, now as tender as Hosea, to turn Judas from his contemptible purpose. The estrangement, however, proved to be complete, and the hatred and contempt of the disappointed seeker after the Jewish Messiah were left to work their will.

4. *Interpretation of the supper*—Manifestly it is what it has been beautifully called, “Jesus' last parable,” the consecration into a memorial

¹ International Sunday-School Lesson for November 4, 1906.

of the familiar elements of the daily meal. It would have been quite impossible under the circumstances for the disciples to have gained any such doctrines as that of Jesus' "real presence" or "mystical presence" in the elements, the language employed conforming closely to that of the Jewish ritual, which admitted of no such interpretation. Whether Jesus intended formally to institute a sacrament or not, such a loving memorial could have but one outcome for his disciples. The transformation of the Supper into the mystical repetition of Jesus' sacrifice, as it is dramatically presented in the Roman mass, is one of the interesting developments of history.

II. EXPOSITION

Jesus' work in Jerusalem came to a close on Tuesday, when after two days of disingenuous questionings and of veiled but deep animosity he broke openly with the leaders of the people, pronouncing with reckless candor and terrible earnestness the woes of Matt., chap. 23. He retired at once to Olivet and Bethany, where he spent the time until the preparation for the feast. Under the circumstances the disciples might naturally have expected him to eat the Passover in Bethany, which would have been legally permissible and much safer than Jerusalem. Jesus chose, however, to keep the feast with the multitudes of his brethren in the city which he had loved, seemingly in vain. The lamb was slaughtered in the temple between three and five in the afternoon, and baked in an earthen oven. Thin, flat cakes of unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and a spiced sauce formed the other elements of the feast. In the bare, upper room was spread a low table about which were placed cushions, each large enough for three persons, upon which the guests reclined, leaning upon the left arm. Jesus occupied the center of the middle mat, this being the position of honor, with John at his right and Judas probably at his left. After the sorry exhibition of a proud and contentious spirit and Jesus' gentle and memorable rebuke (John 13:1-20), Jesus resumed his place, pronounced the blessing upon the feast, poured out and gave to his disciples the first cup, passed the bitter herbs, carved the lamb, and started the second cup on its journey around the table. Then came the startling announcement (cf. Ps. 41:9) of the traitor's presence, intended partly, no doubt, to forewarn the disciples, and partly as the last effort of friendship to touch and to turn the heart of the man who reclined uneasily by his side. During the chorus of questions, so phrased as to constitute emphatic denials ("Surely, Master, it is not I?"), Judas learns that his purpose is known to Jesus, and either withdraws on the pretext of some secret errand (John 13:27), or takes his departure hurriedly at the close of the feast. At just what point in the feast Jesus

instituted the Lord's Supper is a matter for conjecture; probably, however before the third cup, known as the "cup of blessing." The meal then proceeded to its close, ending with the singing of the Great Hallel (Ps. 136). With this song of thanksgiving and of praise upon his lips Jesus went out into the night on his way toward Gethsemane and Calvary.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: THE SACRAMENT OF FRIENDSHIP

Introduction: oriental conception of the tie. Cf. Trumbull's "Blood Covenant."

1. Jesus as a friend: (a) toward friends; (b) toward enemies; (c) toward an indifferent world.

2. Duty of those who partake of the sacrament: (a) to love "even as;" (b) to forgive "even as;" (c) to serve "even as."

Close: the sacrament as a remembrancer, an inspiration, and a prophecy of the future kingdom.

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XL. THE AGONY, BETRAYAL, AND ARREST

MATT. 26:36-50²

I. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

These refer chiefly to the site of Gethsemane, the relation, divergences, and omissions in the gospel accounts, and the authenticity of the episode.

1. Gethsemane, which literally means "oil-press," was probably located not far from the traditional site, some eight or ten rods beyond the bridge spanning the Kidron. A stone wall here incloses several very ancient olive trees.

2. Matthew's and Mark's accounts indicate a common source or direct dependence one upon the other. The chief differences are: (a) Matthew assigns progress toward victory in Jesus' prayer (which contributes to literary completeness), and (b) Jesus' words to Judas (vs. 50) find no parallel in Mark. Luke's account of the agony is much briefer and less intense, with the exception of two details not found in the others (Luke 22:43, 44) which, while embodying a genuine evangelic tradition, were not there originally. John omits the account of the agony entirely.

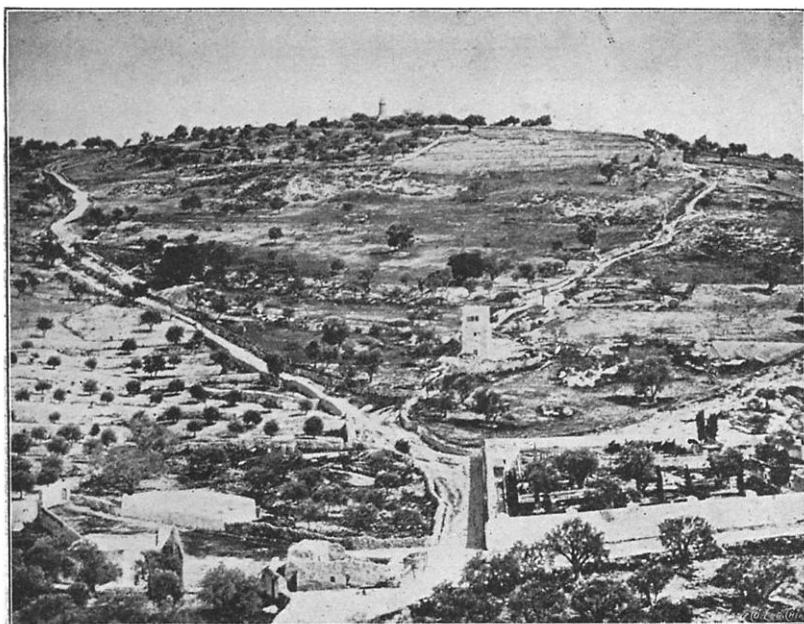
3. The authenticity of the episode has been questioned as being incompatible with the character of Jesus and particularly the confident assurances recently uttered. The difficulty is not to be resolved by saying that Jesus was here merely *acting* for the instruction of his disciples, nor

² International Sunday-School Lesson for November 11, 1906.

by introducing an unwarrantable dualism into his personality. Doubtless his sensitive nature would recoil at the thought of a violent death, but the real soul-agony consisted in the consciousness that the people's sin was reaching its climax in the rejection of him and of his message of divine love and grace.

II. EXPOSITION

On reaching Gethsemane, Jesus leaves all but three of his disciples behind while he goes to pray. These, who have been with him on other



GETHSEMANE AND THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

special occasions, and who are better fitted to sympathize with him, observe evidences of deepest anguish, and Jesus tells them openly that an awful burden is crushing out his life. Entreating their sympathy, he withdraws alone where, by the light of the moon, they see him fall upon his face and in the stillness hear him praying that, if possible, the cup of anguish may pass away; yet he would be subservient to his Father's will. Again, again, and again during his prayer he returns to the disciples, only to find them sleeping. He gently chides them, addressing Peter, who had so recently boasted of his loyalty, admonishing them now not only to watch with him

as before, but also to pray lest temptation overtake them, since, although the spirit—i.e., the better self—is ready, yet the flesh—i.e., the lower self—is weak. The mental tension, the physical exhaustion, the gloomy foreboding, all tended to induce sleep, and, as Mark picturesquely says, their eyes were being weighted down. So far as human sympathy was concerned, Jesus was alone. Returning the last time with complete victory within himself and the inner certainty of his Father's will, he exclaims with mingled pain and grief to his sleeping disciples: "So you are sleeping and taking your rest!" Already the leader of an armed band from the authorities, who had not dreamed of Jesus' making no resistance, is recognized as Judas who, meeting Jesus coming calmly out of the garden, greets him fervently with the kiss, which was the customary greeting of friends, but which in this case had been arranged by Judas as the sign to the officers of Jesus' identity. The rebuke administered to the traitor (vs. 50) before he gives himself up for arrest reminds Judas of the previous fellowship, and at the same time reveals Jesus' consciousness of his sham affection.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMON: JESUS' VICTORY AND THE DISCIPLES' DISGRACE.

Introduction: Scene and attendant circumstances.

I. Jesus' victory.

1. Intensity of struggle, unique in gospel records, but real and personal.
2. Meaning of struggle in view of Jesus' previous attitude and predictions.
3. Elements involved in the victory: (a) moral insight to realize the presence of a crisis; (b) thoughtfulness for the disciples, keeping him alert for their sakes; (c) especially, prayer; (d) spirit of obedience to God in spite of dreadful consequences foreseen.

II. The disciples' disgrace.

1. Its elements: it consisted in: (a) sleeping at their post; (b) failing to share responsibility (they were in danger as well as Jesus); (c) disobedience to Jesus.

2. Its cause: (a) physical and mental weariness; (b) over-self-confidence; (c) lack of sympathy with Jesus; (d) failure to watch and pray.

Crises come to every life. Let all who would share Jesus' triumph seek the elements of Jesus' victory, and let all who would avoid the disciples' disgrace avoid also the causes producing it.

XLI. JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS

MATT. 26:57-68³

I. CRITICAL

The present account is paralleled by Mark 14:53-65 and supplemented by Luke 22:54, 55 and 63-71. The account of a trial before Annas is found in John 18:12-27. Matthew and Mark narrate a trial before Caiaphas and emphasize the authority of the night session, and Luke describes a trial before the chief priests (plural), and lays special stress on the gather-



COURT OF "THE HOUSE OF CAIAPHAS," JUST OUTSIDE THE ZION GATE

ing at break of day. It must be remembered that Annas, a former high-priest, father-in-law of Caiaphas, and apparently the instigator of the present process, had been removed from office by Roman authority and was still acknowledged by many Jews. It is not unnatural to suppose that Jesus then was dragged before him immediately for a preliminary hearing, while the call went out to the Sanhedrin for a hurried trial, naturally at the palace of Caiaphas, the ruling high-priest; and that the determination to crucify Jesus was unanimously reached at the midnight meeting, but final judgment was delayed until a second session at daybreak, which was the formal and only legal one.

³International Sunday-School Lesson for November 18, 1906.

II. EXPOSITION

Vs. 57: Matthew simply mentions scribes and elders, evidently deeming it unnecessary to announce the presence of the high-priests in the hierarchal residence. See Mark.

Vs. 58: Bruce well says Peter had "just enough of the hero in him to bring him into the region of temptation." He remained in the outer court open to the sky, where fire was made, while the trial was conducted in a roofed hall screened by draperies from the damp night air and the gaze of petty officers and servants.

Vs. 59: Any kind of evidence was admissible. The anxiety was to trump up by unscrupulous witnesses charges that would hang together sufficiently to justify and insure the procuratorial approbation of death as penalty.

Vs. 60: At first consistent witnesses could not be found, and not because they were few. This indicates the falsity of the testimony adduced. After the greatest effort two plausible statements were uncovered.

Vs. 61: Even these two did not absolutely agree; cf. Mark 14:59. Jesus never said: "I am able to destroy the temple of God;" cf. John 2:19-21.

Vs. 62: The high-priest, excited and impatient, wished by dramatic posture and question to invest these boastful misstatements with deep significance.

Vs. 63: Jesus' silence forced the high-priest to his last resource, namely, to place Jesus judicially under oath on the "cardinal question of his Messiahship." The Christ and the Son of the Living God are included in the one question.

Vs. 64: Jesus accepted the oath as administered by a competent judge and swore affirmatively to the question. He further assumed the messianic picture in Dan. 7:13.

Vs. 65: The tearing of the high-priestly garments was in accordance with rule. "The Talmudists actually give instructions as to the particular garments that are to be torn as occasion requires! and as to the particular part of the garments, too, in which the tear should take place."—Morison.

Vs. 66: The penalty of blasphemy against God was death (Lev. 24:16).

III. A SUGGESTED SERMON: JESUS FACING OPPOSITION

1. *A faithless friend*.—Peter followed afar off, sat with the servants, and finally was guilty of treason. Disloyalty the hardest blow to a leader.

2. *A biased judge, a packed jury, and bought witnesses*.—Ancient injustice. The need of strict justice in our day.

3. *A shameless mob*.—Wicked rulers and judges invariably have vile persons to lend themselves as tools. Lynching in our day.

4. *A calm, silent, self-restrained prisoner*.—(a) Toward Peter, calm. (b) Toward the religious leaders, silent. Suffering in great causes is inevitable (Matt. 5:11). (c) Toward the mob, self-restrained.

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